

FARM SAFETY

By Daphne Holterman and Jason Karszes

Rosy-Lane Holsteins LLC in Watertown, Wisconsin implemented an enhanced safety program that meets OSHA standards.

A Wisconsin producer's approach to farm safety and OSHA compliance

With a focus on farm safety due to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) Local Emphasis Program (LEP) for New York, many farmers are taking a step back to look at what is occurring on their farm. While most farmers make concerted efforts to be safe, improvements can be made.

OSHA implemented a LEP approach in Wisconsin over two years ago and dairy producers there have worked through a similar approach. One farm that has taken an active approach to improve employee and owner safety is Rosy-Lane Holsteins.

They share their experiences and changes over the last three years as they stepped back to evaluate the safety of their business, made changes and continued to strive to create the safest and most rewarding place of employment they can.

1. Describe your dairy farm.

Rosy-Lane Holsteins LLC, Watertown, Wisconsin

has 20 full-time employees plus four owners/partners: Lloyd and Daphne Holterman, Tim Strobel, and Jordan Matthews. We have 900 milk cows and farm 1,560 acres to grow corn for silage and alfalfa haylage. Some grasses are also harvested. We have farmed for 33 years.

2. Before the OSHA LEP was announced for Wisconsin, what were you doing on your farm associated with farm safety?

We had occasional farm meetings where we mentioned some safety items. We had Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) signs on every piece of equipment. We provided Personal Protective Equipment -- gloves, goggles and masks for dusty jobs. We had a page of safety rules in our SOP that we asked employees to sign when they started working here.

3. After the LEP was announced, what was your thought process concerning employee and owner safety on the farm and how you could approach potentially being inspected?

Of course the over-riding goal was to create a safer workplace and have safety be more "top of mind" for all staff every day. Also, one ultimate goal is to reduce Workers' Compensation rates and premiums, which we have done. We work here too, every day, and want to be proactive in many ways. Safety was one area where we needed outside perspective.



Aerial view of Rosy-Lane Holsteins in Watertown, WI.

FYI

■ Jason Karszes is a farm management specialist with the PRO-DAIRY program at Cornell University. His email is jk57@cornell.edu.

■ Daphne Holterman is a partner at Rosy-Lane Holsteins LLC in Watertown, Wisconsin. Email her at Daphne@rosylane.com.

4. What did you choose to do?

We invited our Wisconsin State Laboratory of Hygiene to come and do a consultation at our farm. The only criteria was that we had to fix “serious dangers.” We agreed. We looked at the entire list of recommendations they gave us and opted to do 90% of them. It probably cost us \$25,000 or more in supplies and time. But if we save this in two years by reducing lost work days and Workers’ Compensation rates it will be worth it. So, this group told us all the things we’d have to implement to pass an OSHA audit/inspection. We think we are ready.

5. What did this entail?

We had to fix small things like replace a cover on an electrical outlet receptacle. One corner was chipped off and this was a serious danger. 39 cents later it was “AOK.”

A lot of what we had to do was paperwork, checklists and reporting. We had to set up the systems for this and inform employees about OSHA and injuries. Some recommendations from the consultation included:

- Create a file for OSHA 300 logs and keep them updated. Post form 300A each year. Coordinate Workers’ Compensation insurance papers and requirements.

- Create facility “walk-through” check lists with what needs to be fixed and document what is fixed in a timely manner. Two staff, one from crops and one from cows, now do this monthly.

- Offer first aid and CPR training to key staff every two years at the farm.

- Implement progressive discipline for not following safety rules. You can’t just “slap someone on the wrist” 10 times for doing something wrong/unsafe.

- Create a “items to repair” list, which is kept by the time clock. When a repair is complete staff notes this. This record reminds staff to jot down something they saw that needs to be fixed.

- Label jugs and any container with soap, chemical or substance that is not in the original container. This has been an uphill battle. Some jugs get wrong things in them! We ordered special labels and tape and use them when needed.

- Discuss safety and remind employees of critical areas where we have observed “drift” at every farm meeting.

- Create an official list of training for all equipment operators.

- Install self-illuminated exit signs in all buildings.

- Install cement steps in two locations that access barns.

- Add railings and kick plates to storage areas above the first floor.

- Create a formal fire extinguisher inspection program with monthly and annual refills.

- Use Lock Out/Tag Out for all electrical access points.

- Create a confined spaces plan. We modeled ours after the University of Wisconsin Marshfield Research Station plan, but added our own photos. We then had to get equipment, including a winch, several harnesses, an air sensor that has to be calibrated twice a year, and put all needed items in plastic containers in two locations near access to confined spaces. Provide annual training to key staff. File all papers after each access to these locations.



Rosy-Lane Holsteins farm partners include Jordan Matthews, Tim Strobel, and Lloyd and Daphne Holterman.

- Create and follow a Hazard Communication Plan.

- Create and use accident investigation forms, along with Workers’ Compensation claim forms, when needed.

- Schedule an annual audit with our insurance agency. We usually get high marks.

- Consider being part of local safety council. If I had more time, I would do this!

- Create binders of material safety data sheets (MSDS). New requirements are being implemented, so these must be updated by 2015.

- Add a belt to the portable compressor/milker.

- Replace numerous extension cords with nicks. Wet and damaged cords can electrocute. The fine for each compromised cord is \$7,000!

- Modify portable fuel tank.

- Enhance employee training in many areas, not just new employee orientation. Every meeting contains some safety reminders. Safety handouts are available at Gemplers.com. We try to do “tailgate” training sessions of 15 minutes with few topics and lots of time for questions. This is less formal than a “you aren’t doing this properly” meeting that employees might not listen much to.

- Update our Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and employee manual annually.

- Post signs: manure lagoon, bunkers, barns and icy areas.

- Keep Slow Moving Vehicle (SMV) signs clean!

There are many more things, but this covers a broad representation of the types of things we changed or implemented.

6. How much did you invest over the process?

We spent at least \$25,000 to start with and more since then in maintenance. I would say \$5,000 a year minimum in expenses and staff time, probably more like \$10,000 a year if you are more liberal in defining “safety.”

7. What has been the hardest thing to stay consistent or follow through with?

Labeling chemical jugs (transfer vessels) from the large 55 gal drums. Getting partners and staff to use paperwork for confined spaces and to follow all protocols for their own safety. Getting staff to throw away extension cords and other electric tools that can't be repaired and aren't safe.

8. What benefits have you seen from your efforts?

Workers' Compensation insurance has been very low and we get a "rebate" each year worth \$10,000 to \$12,000 for being safe and having few/no days of lost work. Employees are safer now and no major accidents have occurred. We hope safety is more top of mind for everyone as they go about their daily duties. We try to encourage positive "peer pressure" for all employees to follow safety guidelines.

9. Other comments?

Each farm is very individualized and a specialist must go through your operation and ask many questions to help you determine what you need to beef up, add or change. If we continue to say "don't take risks" and/or "it's OK to say, no, I can't do that job because I haven't been trained to do it yet," we hope employees see our high level of interest in being safe. Safety training must be incorporated in many things you do and across all areas of the farm. It is not just safety as a stand-alone. And, it's not just the first day or week of work when this is covered.

The paperwork to track safety things can be a bit much. But, it makes sense for the most part, and the cause is a good one. This type of record keeping I rather like, compared to requirements for our CAFO permit and our Department of Natural Resources, which



Harvest at Rosy-Lane Holsteins LLC. Slow Moving Vehicle signs and reflector tapes are dusty and should be cleaned before driving on the road.

we don't see as many direct results from. At least with safety, you see some progress.

I would like to become a full-time safety officer, but time does not allow this. We have talked about hiring a person and sharing them with several farms. This person would inspect farms, conduct trainings at farms and guide us in having 100% safe farms. I think this is a major area of opportunity for some enterprising people. They could even do the fire extinguishers check-ups. This is a value-added service that farms will directly benefit from.

None of us want a death or injury on our conscience. □

Submit papers for an environmental systems and climate adaptation conference

A three-day regional conference and trade show sponsored by PRO-DAIRY, the Cornell Institute for Climate Change and Agriculture, and the Animal Agriculture and Climate Change Project will be held in summer 2015.

It will feature an unique opportunity to learn about emerging dairy housing and manure management systems in conjunction with regional climate trends and adaptation strategies for the Northeast and upper Midwest U.S. The conference will include multiple tour options showcasing on-farm integrated waste handling/treatment

systems and on-farm climate adaptation strategies. The synergistic nature of these two topic areas will expose creative solutions to the most pressing of today's dairy environmental challenges. Tours of interest will also be organized for spouses and families. Paper submissions should include the presentation topic, paper title and a 150 word abstract. Include: name, title, affiliation; email address; preference for oral or poster presentation; and indication of commitment to make deadlines. Abstract submission deadline is November 1, 2014.

The program is sponsored by:

■ CORNELL PRO-DAIRY PROGRAM

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■ CORNELL INSTITUTE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE

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